



DASTGĀH

DASTGĀH (دستگاه), modal system in Persian music, representing a level of organization at which a certain number of melodic types (*gūšas*) are regrouped and ordered in relation to a dominant mode (*māya*). Each *dastgāh* takes its name from this dominant mode, which is always played in the introductory parts. For example, *dastgāh-e Čahārgāh* comprises not only several *gūšas* belonging to the mode Čahārgāh but also *gūšas* in modes that are both closely (Zābol, Ḥešār) and distantly (Moḳālef) related, which are played before the conclusion (*forūd*) in the initial mode. The term *dastgāh* is thus somewhat ambiguous: “The expression *dastgāh-e chahārgāh* . . . means either the major unitary modal complex *chahārgāh* or a whole set of *gushes* traditionally performed with *chahārgāh* at their head as the principal modal nucleus” (Powers, p. 426). Theoretically Čahārgāh can be correctly labeled a *dastgāh* only to the extent that it is composite, that is, comprises a minimal number of varying modal elements; without these elements it must be considered either a *maqām* (as Kāleqī suggested, pp. 127-28) or a simple mode (*māya*).

According to some practicing musicians (personal communication), the etymology of the term *dastgāh* can be associated with the idea of “the position (*gāh*) of the hand (*dast*) [on the neck of the instrument],” that is, the scale, for a similar idea of position appears in the names of modes like Dogāh and Segāh. It is more appropriate to translate it as “system,” however, for the *dastgāh* is first and foremost a collection of discrete and heterogeneous elements organized into a hierarchy that is entirely coherent though nevertheless



flexible

The defining features of the *dastgāh* are thus a certain modal variety subjected to a course of development (*sayr*) that is determined by the preestablished order of sequences, or *gūšas*. This order can, however, vary within certain limits, depending on the repertoire or the taste of the interpreter. This definition is equally applicable to the *āvāz* (q.v.), which is, however, less developed and can itself be included in a *dastgāh* (e.g., Bayāt-e Kord, which can be played separately or as part of *dastgāh-e Šūr*). The extended version of a *dastgāh* like Šūr may encompass as many as fifty *gūšas* (During, 1991), a dozen of which are the most important; an *āvāz* like Bayāt-e Kord, on the other hand, may include only about seven *gūšas*, of which three are essential. Other *āvāzes*, like Bayāt-e Eşfahān in its extended versions (Ma'rūfī, s.v.), could theoretically also be labeled *dastgāh*.

The overall structure of a *dastgāh* consists of three main parts corresponding to blocs of *gūšas*: the introductory sequence (*darāmad*, q.v.) or sequences, which are developed in the fundamental mode (*māya*, *maqām*); the sections comprising modulations or transpositions; and the rapid return (*forūd*) to the initial mode. In general there is a gradual progression up the scale, while the return is more rapid, and the ambitus of the melodies is progressively expanded within each section (Nettl, pp. 21-22). In principle the interpreter is always free to determine the content of each *dastgāh* and to modify, up to a point, the order of the *gūšas*, but in practice certain *dastgāhs* (or *āvāzes*), like Šūr and Homāyūn, seem to permit greater liberty than do others, like Čahārgāh and Rāst-Panjgāh, which are more standardized (Nettl, pp. 105-06).

Although there are twelve *dastgāhs* and *āvāzes*, they represent only six or seven scales (During, 1984, p. 105; idem, 1991, passim), in Rūḥ-Allāh Kāleqī's view only five (p. 127). In certain instances the features distinguishing *dastgāhs* are purely structural (pauses, *īst*; variable notes; concluding notes; etc.) and connected with motifs (conclusion, or *forūd*; introduction; etc.). *Dastgāhs* can also be distinguished by such other characteristics as the sequence of modulations, the diapason, or the dominant chord (e.g., in the lower register for the *dastgāhs*, in the upper register for the *āvāzes*). All these elements are involved in the definition of "mode" in the broad sense, particularly in eastern music (Powers, pp. 434, 437). Despite their differentiating features, the *dastgāhs* are by no means closed systems but share certain *gūšas* among them: For example, the *gūša* Jāmadarān is played with different adaptations in Bayāt-e Eşfahān, Afšārī, Homāyūn, and Bayāt-e



Tork (During, 1984, p. 142). In principle each *dastgāh* has an expressive coloration, an individual ethos (Joneydī, pp. 218-22), but it cannot always be characterized in a consistent manner. The definition thus remains more fluid and general because the ethos depends in large part on the interpretation. It is nevertheless agreed that Navā is rather serene and meditative, Čahārgāh martial, Māhūr cheerful or majestic, Šūr melancholy, and Homāyūn pathetic; the characters of the other *dastgāhs* are less settled.

Both the term *dastgāh* and the musical form itself are indigenous to Persian (and Azerī) music and were no doubt elaborated during the revival of traditional music in the 19th century. The term is found in an Azerī work of 1301/1884 (Safarova) and, in about 1287/1870, in an unpublished list of terms compiled by Malek-Manšūr-zāda in Baku. The older term that comes closest to it is *āvāz* (Šafi-al-Dīn Ormavī, 13th century), and, according to Kāleqī (p. 125), when these *āvāzes* were expanded they were called *dastgāhs*. The twelve were thus assembled: seven *dastgāhs* (Šūr, Segāh, Čahārgāh, Māhūr, Homāyūn, Navā, and Rāst-Panjgāh) and five *āvāzes* (Abū 'Aṭā, Bayāt-e Tork, Afšārī, Daštī, Bayāt-e Eṣfahān). The first four of these *āvāzes* (to which Bayāt-e Kord is sometimes added) are considered to have been derived from Šūr and the last from Homāyūn. Among all the *dastgāhs* and *āvāzes* Šūr is the most significant, both because of its scope and because it is the most familiar (Kāleqī, p. 129).

In the Azarbaijan tradition, which is very close to the Persian tradition in this respect, twelve *dastgāhs* (or principal *maqāms*) were recognized, seven of them essential (Rāst, Šūr, Segāh, Čahārgāh, Māhūr, Bayāt-e Šīrāz, Homāyūn), the rest less important (Šūštar, Bayāt-e Kord, Bayāt-e Qājār, Navā-Nīšāpūr, Rahāb). To these should be added about ten modes (*maqāms*) and fifteen subsidiary modes (*šo'bas*; During, 1988, pp. 38-39; cf. pp. 193-98 for information from earlier periods).

Despite all the changes that Persian music has undergone (and despite internal modifications in the *dastgāhs*), the system of twelve *dastgāhs* and *āvāzes* has remained generally the same as when it was codified by the masters of the last century, in particular Mīrzā 'Abd-Allāh (d. 1337/1918, q.v.). No new *dastgāh* or large *gūša* has been devised since that codification. When an *āvāz* or *dastgāh* has been further developed, it has almost always been through borrowing materials from other *dastgāhs*, rather than through invention, and the rare *gūšas* that have since been added to the traditional corpus (*radīf*) are only melodies or variations that present no novelty from a modal point of view. From this remarkable stability it can be deduced that the system has achieved



“canonical” status in Persia (though perhaps less so in Azarbaijan), comparable to that of the twelve *maqāms* and twenty-four *šoʻbas* that prevailed between the 14th and 17th centuries; the breaking down and reassembling of that material produced the present system of *dastgāhs*.

For a music sample, see [Borumand – Daramads of šur](#).

For a music sample, see [Hosaynqoli – Shur](#).

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